

# Disaster Assistance

## Food, shelter, cash payments, loans, and other help for victims of major disasters

### Federal disaster assistance is provided to victims of a major disaster through...

- the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the Individual and Family Grant Program (IFGP), Disaster Unemployment Assistance (DUA), the Small Business Administration (SBA), and emergency provisions of other benefit programs such as food stamps.
- FEMA, the key federal coordinating agency, works in concert with and provides referrals to other agencies administering disaster relief.

**NOTE:** The most common “major disasters” are earthquakes, storms, and civil unrest.

### FEMA provides...

- *Temporary Housing Assistance* – Rent payments for people who must relocate due to disaster-related damage to their home or apartment.
- *Mortgage and Rental Assistance* – Rent or mortgage payments for people suffering a financial hardship due to the disaster and facing eviction or foreclosure.
- *Minimal Repairs Program* – Grants to homeowners, typically up to \$10,000, to restore the habitability of their home.

### Other programs

#### The Individual and Family Grant Program (IFGP)

- Provides grants to persons needing financial help for disaster-related expenses such as housing repairs and cleanup, replacement of household and job essentials (including transportation), and medical, dental, and funeral costs.
- To receive IFGP for purposes other than medical, dental, and funeral costs, an individual must be ineligible for an SBA loan, or must have received an SBA loan that is inadequate to cover his or her needs.
- The IFGP is administered through state Offices of Emergency Services or similar state agencies.

### Disaster Unemployment Assistance (DUA)

- Provides cash income to persons who become unemployed due to a major disaster. DUA is administered by the U.S. Department of Labor through state employment agencies.

### Food programs

- Emergency food stamps and food distribution are provided to meet emergency food needs arising after a disaster. These food programs are administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture through state social services agencies or similar state or local organizations.

### Short-term, noncash, in-kind emergency disaster assistance

- Numerous agencies independently provide food, water, shelter, medical care, emergency shelter, search and rescue, and other services to minimize threats to life, property, and public health and safety.

### Small Business Administration (SBA) loans

- Low-interest loans to homeowners, renters, and large and small businesses to repair or replace damaged homes, personal property, or businesses.

### Individuals qualify for disaster assistance who...

- have suffered a loss caused by an event that the president of the United States has declared to be a major disaster.
- apply soon after a disaster is declared, within the application period for the particular benefit program.

### Special considerations for immigrants and their families

- Receipt of disaster relief does not have public charge consequences.
- All immigrants, regardless of status, are eligible for short-term, noncash, in-kind, emergency disaster relief and similar services.

*continued following table* ➤

<b>Disaster Assistance</b>	
<b>ELIGIBLE IMMIGRANTS</b>	<b>INELIGIBLE IMMIGRANTS</b>
<b>FEMA Assistance Programs, Individual and Family Grant Program, and Disaster Unemployment Assistance</b>	
<p><b>“Qualified”</b> immigrants<sup>1</sup> and <b>victims of trafficking</b><sup>2</sup></p> <p>NOTE: To receive DUA, “qualified” immigrants and victims of trafficking must have employment authorization.</p>	<p><b>“Not qualified”</b> immigrants<sup>3</sup> are ineligible, except for services that provide short-term, noncash, in-kind emergency disaster relief.</p>
<b>Short-Term, Noncash, In-Kind Emergency Disaster Relief</b>	
<p><b>All immigrants</b>, regardless of status.</p> <p>NOTE: FEMA interprets the short-term disaster relief provision to apply to programs that provide: search and rescue; emergency medical care; emergency mass care; emergency shelter; clearance of roads and construction of temporary bridges necessary to the performance of emergency tasks and essential community services; warning of further risk or hazards; dissemination of public information and assistance regarding health and safety measures; provision of food, water, medicine, and other essential needs, including movement of supplies or persons; and reduction of immediate threats to life, property, and public health and safety.</p>	<p>None.</p>
<b>Emergency Food Stamps<sup>4</sup></b>	
<p><b>Children</b> under 18 years old who were lawfully residing in the U.S. on Aug. 22, 1996, and who are now “qualified” immigrants.</p> <p><b>Seniors</b> who were born before Aug. 22, 1931, were lawfully residing in the U.S. on Aug. 22, 1996, and who are now “qualified” immigrants.</p> <p><b>Persons receiving benefits for blindness or disability</b>, who were lawfully residing in the U.S. on Aug. 22, 1996. Disability-related benefits may include: Supplemental Security Income, Social Security disability, state disability or retirement pension, railroad retirement disability, veteran’s disability, disability-based Medicaid, or possibly General Assistance for certain persons with disabilities.</p> <p><b>Lawful permanent residents (LPRs)</b> credited with 40 quarters of work.</p> <p><b>“Refugee”</b> categories: individuals granted status as a refugee, asylee, person granted withholding of removal/deportation, Amerasian immigrant, or Cuban/Haitian entrant, during the seven years after obtaining this status. Eligibility continues during this period even if the “refugee” becomes an LPR. Even after the seven-year period expires, these immigrants may be eligible under another category listed on this page.</p> <p><b>Victims of trafficking.</b></p> <p><b>Veterans</b> and active duty military personnel, their spouses, unremarried surviving spouses, and children, who are “qualified” immigrants.</p> <p><b>Certain Hmong or Highland Laotian tribe members</b> who are lawfully present in the U.S., and were members of these tribes during the Vietnam era; spouses, unremarried widows/widowers, and children of these tribe members also are eligible.</p> <p><b>A member of a federally recognized Indian tribe, or an American Indian born in Canada.</b></p> <p><b>Some states</b> also provide state-funded food assistance to <b>additional categories of immigrants.</b></p>	<p><b>“Qualified”</b> immigrants not listed as eligible.</p> <p><b>“Not qualified”</b> immigrants other than American Indians and Hmong or Laotian tribe members described as eligible.</p>

<sup>1</sup> “Qualified” immigrants – are: (1) lawful permanent residents (LPRs); (2) refugees, asylees, persons granted withholding of deportation/removal, conditional entry (in effect prior to Apr. 1, 1980), or paroled into the U.S. for at least one year; (3) Cuban/Haitian entrants; and (4) battered spouses and children with a pending or approved (a) self-petition for an immigrant visa, or (b) immigrant visa filed for a spouse or child by a U.S. citizen or LPR, or (c) application for cancellation of removal/suspension of deportation, whose need for benefits has a substantial connection to the battery or cruelty. Parent/child of such battered child/spouse are also “qualified.”

<sup>2</sup> A “victim of trafficking” is an individual who has been subjected to a “severe form of trafficking in persons” as defined by the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Prevention Act of 2000. Severe forms of trafficking include sex trafficking and the forced or fraudulent recruitment, harboring, transport or provision of a person for labor or services that subject the person to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery.

<sup>3</sup> “Not qualified immigrant,” as used in this *Guide*, refers to a person who is a non-U.S. citizen and is not a “qualified immigrant.”

<sup>4</sup> See the chapter on Food Stamps (page 132) for additional detail.

**To apply a person should...**

- contact FEMA via telephone at (800) 462-9029; TDD (800) 462-7585 (following some disasters, FEMA opens Disaster Recovery Centers where people can obtain information or apply for assistance).

**The law governing federal disaster assistance appears at:**

Stafford Disaster and Relief Act 42 U.S.C. §§ 5121, et seq., 44 C.F.R. §§ 206.1, et seq. (FEMA and IFGP), 20 C.F.R. §§ 625.1, et seq. (DUA), 7 C.F.R. §§ 280.1, et seq. (Emergency Food Coupons and Food Distribution), 15 U.S.C. §§ 634, et seq., 13 C.F.R. §§ 123.1, et seq. (SBA); immigrant eligibility described in Memorandum from Lacy E. Suiter, Federal Emergency Management Agency, Executive Associate Director, Response and Recovery Directorate Policy No. 4430.140C, Policy on Verification of Citizenship, Qualified Alien Status and Eligibility for Disaster Assistance (Mar. 2, 1998).